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U.S. and China Seek Accord on Planned Port Call

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WASHINGTON, May 6 — The United States and China are engaged in "delicate negotiations" to decide whether Navy ships will pay a planned port call at Shanghai next week, a State Department official said today.

The talks, being held in Peking, have been going on since China said last month that the United States had pledged not to include ships carrying nuclear weapons. The United States denied that such assurances had been given, and the talks have not produced an accord on what should be said.

The issue is deemed so important by the United States that a State Department official said today that the port call by three destroyers might have to be postponed if no accord can be worked out in the next few days.

The United States has a policy of not specifying whether any particular warship carries nuclear weapons. When New Zealand insisted on assurances earlier this year that a United States destroyer wishing to pay a port call would not have nuclear weapons aboard, the visit was canceled.

Since then, relations between the two countries have become strained, with the United States cutting New Zealand off from intelligence information and

canceling all joint maneuvers.

In the Chinese case, the issue was revived on April 10, when Hu Yaobang, the Communist Party leader, told a group of journalists from Australia and New Zealand that China had received American assurances that no ship visiting a Chinese port would be nuclear-armed.

The next day, the State Department denied that it had given such assurances. The Chinese Embassy in Canberra, Australia, reacted April 15 by saying:

"United States conventionally powered naval vessels may call at a Chinese port on an informal ceremonial

visit. This is a matter solely between China and the United States and there are questions remaining to be settled between the two sides."

Today a State Department official confirmed that the ships planning to visit China would be conventionally powered, but he went out of his way to repeat that there had been no easing of policy over the issue of nuclear arms on board.

"Our policy on the fundamental issue of ship visits remains the same," he said. "Namely, that we neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear arms on our ships. No U.S. ship visits can take place anywhere in the world except under this policy."

He said he "fully expects" that the ship visit to China will occur, but he said he could not predict when.

The United States and China have

viewed the port call as a symbolic demonstration of the improved state of relations. American officials said the Chinese were caught in the middle between their desire to see the United States maintain a strong military presence in the Pacific to offset the Russians and their desire to play a prominent role in third-world affairs, where antinuclear policies are popular.

China has had its own nuclear weapons since 1964 and, unlike New Zealand, has no particular antinuclear policy. It is seeking to develop a nuclear power industry and to maintain nuclear missiles as a deterrent against the Soviet Union.

A Pentagon official said some American officials were speculating that some Chinese officials were wary of any appearances of a military relationship with the United States and were

working behind the scenes to block the port calls. The Chinese are currently engaged in negotiations with the Soviet Union on improving relations.

The United States persists in refusing to say whether a ship is carrying nuclear arms because countries like Japan that have an antinuclear policy would not be able to allow American ships to call if an explicit statement had to be issued on which ships were nuclear-armed.